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NEWS TIPS

UD HISTORIAN WHO LIVED THROUGH DEC. 7 AND SEPT. 11 COMPARES EVENTS ON 60th ANNIVERSARY OF PEARL HARBOR

Frank Mathias remembers watching Manila burn — large steel and concrete buildings, designed to be earthquake-proof, succumbing to fire in a scene very similar to that in New York in September. Instead of a 16-acre area of destruction, however, the devastation in Manila encompassed three to four square miles, he said.

Mathias, professor emeritus of history at the University of Dayton, served from 1943 to 1946 in the U.S. Army Infantry, 37th "Buckeye" division, in the South Pacific theater. He believes the events of and since Sept. 11 are far less a threat to the freedom of the United States and its people than were the threats emanating from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. He also believes the U.S., with prudent actions, will overcome again.

Mathias was 16 years old when he learned of the attacks and ran home to share the news. He discovered his father and uncle already listening intently to the family radio, the medium by which most Americans got the news. "If we of 1941 had had television coverage of the Pearl Harbor attack, viewing the completely unexpected but fiery destruction of the battleships and cruisers no longer able to defend our coastal cities and people, a panic at once deeper and more understandable than that aroused by the recent terrorist attack might well have racked the citizenry," he said.

The major difference between Dec. 7, 1941, and Sept. 11, 2001, may be seen by comparing the threat involved, he added. Upon the advent of Dec. 7, the United States would be at full-scale war with the people and resources of three powerful and fascist nations: Japan, Germany and Italy. "Japan had 191 infantry divisions, Nazi Germany even more, and Italy had perhaps three times as many as did the United States at that moment. The Japanese fleet was far superior to ours in tonnage, and China seemed ready to fall to Japan. The German army had the USSR on the ropes for sure, and very probably would have won if the Japanese had attacked the USSR's Siberian holdings instead of America. Fascist Italy at this time sat astride the Mediterranean area and was a threat to British control of Egypt, the Suez Canal and her Far Eastern empire. In short, the outcome of World War II was a very 'iffy' thing, especially at the time of Pearl Harbor."

The current terrorist threat is far less than the threat the U.S. encountered 60 years ago, because the terrorists responsible for the recent attacks in the nation have no organized military forces and are without the backing of major nations, Mathias said. "They won a round at the World Trade Center through surprise and by turning our own technology against us, and they may win another round or two with germs. But from my own experience in World War II, I can say that even what happened at the WTC bears no comparison in scale to what happened to

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America's colonial city of Manila in February 1945. Most of this city was torn up as badly as the WTC, and 124,000 civilians and soldiers lay dead, some 100,000 of these being civilians massacred by the Japanese occupiers.

"In short, our reaction to the terrorists should eventually be one of studiously bringing fair play to bear on our involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. Panic, like superstition, is self defeating."

Mathias taught history for 24 years at UD. Aside from his academic background, he is also a wonderful story-teller. His most recent of four books, *The G.I. Generation: A Memoir*, won the 2000 Ohioana nonfiction book award. He has also published *Al Kirwan: A Man for All Seasons, Incidents and Experiences in the life of Thomas W. Parsons*, and *G.I. Jive: An Army Bandsman in World War II*. Both *G.I. Jive* and *G.I. Generation* are autobiographical.

For media interviews, call **Frank Mathias** at (937) 299-2561.